



Vietnam Veterans of America

8719 Colesville Road, Suite 100, Silver Spring, MD 20910 • Telephone (301) 585-4000 Fax (301) 585-3180 • Advocacy (301) 585-3180 • Communications (301) 585-2691 www.vva.org

A Not-for-Profit Veterans Service Organization Chartered by the United States Congress

April 20, 2018

The Honorable Phil Roe
Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Walz
Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
333 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Dr. Roe and Congressman Walz:

On behalf of the members, officers, and Board of Directors of Vietnam Veterans of America, we are writing to you to again voice our support for H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act. This legislation would restore presumptive coverage for service-connected ills that afflict several thousand naval personnel who served in the Vietnam theatre of operations – coverage that the Department of Veterans Affairs abruptly ended in March 2002.

During the Vietnam War, some 20 million gallons of “Agent Orange” and other toxic substances was sprayed to remove jungle foliage around fire bases and to deny the enemy the ability to grow or harvest crops. As you know, toxic chemicals in these herbicides have been linked to several afflictions, including non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, various cancers, Type II diabetes, and Parkinson’s disease. The Agent Orange Act of 1991 empowered the VA Secretary to declare certain illnesses presumptive to exposure to Agent Orange, enabling veterans who served in Southeast Asia to receive health care and disability compensation for these afflictions. In March 2002, however, the VA ceased awarding benefits to so-called blue water veterans, limiting those eligible only to “boots on the ground” in-country vets. There was no scientific basis for this move by the VA, nor any involvement of real scientists in this money driven bureaucratic decision. It is time that this wrong done to Blue Water veterans of Vietnam, and their families be set right. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) report in 2011 firmly established the biological plausibility for the exposure of these faithfully serving sailors.

The addition of those who served on the DMZ in Korea at any time corrects another injustice of the VA bureaucratic decision-making that also had no basis in fact. After the spraying of the herbicides in heavy doses along this limited area, nothing was ever done to clean up the soil or the groundwater, so that all who served later were exposed, and therefore should be eligible for benefits and health care as well.

Blue water veterans suffering with any of the presumptive service-connected maladies that the VA acknowledges to be associated with exposure to Agent Orange ought not be excluded from receiving healthcare services and disability compensation for which their boots-on-the-ground brother and sister veterans are eligible. They, too, served honorably and well, and Congressman Valadao’s bill, once it is enacted into law, will accord them benefits that they have earned.

All of us at Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) are grateful for your bipartisan leadership to find an offset, and to at last correct the injustice to these veterans and their families.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Rowan', with a stylized, flowing script.

John Rowan
National President/CEO